Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Two important dates are coming up for collectors in this country, of Central America. First, the Spanish Main meeting in Manchester to be held on Saturday April 5th at the Conservative Club, Urmston Precinct, Manchester from 10.30 a.m. to 4 p.m.. A buffet lunch will be laid on as well as morning coffee and afternoon tea for an overall cost of £2 per head. In addition to excellent displays, there will be a bourse in operation and a small auction is also planned. A free car park is available. Members planning to attend are asked to contact Mike Birks so that luncheon arrangements can be arranged. It is expected that about half this meeting will be devoted to Central America. Both our editor and I hope this meeting will revive our oldtime North Country meetings and make them again a reglar annual event. There will also be the opportunity for members present to discuss the future of the Central American Group and Newsletter. Although this will be on the agenda for the London AGM in June, members who are unable to get to the London meeting will have the chance to air their views.

The Central American Group under Dr R H Saundry, will be staging a Central America meeting for all Spanish Main members at the Victory Services Club on Saturday May 17th. We hope to see all members from London and the home counties at this meeting. There will be interesting exhibits (bring along any new acquisitions or problem pages for discussion) and it is important for us all to get together at least once a year to discuss the future of our C.A. Group. Constructive comments on our future are always welcome from our overseas members.

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John Fosbery
President
The Spanish Main

SPANISH MAIN Annual subscription £5 (UK), £6 (Europe), $15 (elsewhere) The subscription includes four copies of MAINSHEET, and also private treaty lists and auction catalogues.

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The society also runs two specialised groups, the Central American and the Chile groups. The subscription to each group is £3 (UK) or $7 elsewhere, to Spanish Main members, or $10 to non-members (Overseas subscriptions only). This includes four copies of the respective Newsletter, by airmail.

Members whose subscription is overdue will find their address label marked with an "X". Prompt payment will ensure an unbroken run of your Newsletter. - MPB

THE "PAN-AMERICAN POSTAL UNION"

At a recent meeting of the Spanish Main I broached the subject of the "Pan-American Postal Union" and asked fellow members if anyone could provide me with some information as to what it was. George Richardsom has sent me an abstract from a book, "Standard Handbook of Stamp Collecting" by Richard McP Cabeen.

"A South American Postal Union was formed February 2, 1911, at a Latin-American congress in Montevideo, and negotiations for a Pan-American postal union were opened at the congress of the postal union in Madrid. As a result the Spanish-American Postal Convention was signed November 13, 1920. At a later meeting of this group in Madrid in 1931, the name was changed to the Postal Union of the Americas and Spain, and it now includes all autonomous countries of South and Central America, Mexico, Canada, the United States and Spain. Domestic letter rates of each country apply throughout the union for surface mail."

I can confirm that for Costa Rica after 1921 (presumably 13 November 1920), letters to the United States were sent at the prevailing domestic rate, whereas previously they had been treated as foreign U.P.U. countries, ie the single letter rate was lowered from 15 to 10 ctmos.. The treatment of registration is not clear. There have been periods when the domestic registration rate differed from foreign rates and letters to the United States are found with either of them. It is certain that long before 1921 mail was exchanged between the Central American republics at the domestic rates, and there was probably a prior agreement between Mexico and the United States. If anyone could tell me where or when such agreements or conventions were made I would be most grateful.

R.H.S.

COSTA RICA COLLECTORS - ATTENTION!

6corico "Society of Costa Rica Collectors", is the "re-born" equivalent of "Los Aficionados Costaricenses", an international circle of Costa Rica enthusiasts, inspired by H Dana Mitchell who died in 1956. The revived society must have been the brainchild of that grand old man of Costa Rican philately, Alex Cohen, in 1960, and an early and permanent feature of this international society was the establishment of the quarterly journal, the "Oxcart" which in 1985 produced its centenary edition. Anyone who intends to collect Costa Rica is recommended to join this society which has an annual subscription of U.S. $14. Not only does the "Oxcart" contain a wealth of important and interesting articles, but membership brings with it access to a comprehensive library with modestly priced photocopy facilities, and participation in the quarterly mail-bid sales where many bargains can be found.

The present secretary is: Theodore C Willoughby, 7600 Ridgemont Drive, NEWBURGH, IN 47630, USA.

THE REGISTRATION SYSTEM OF COSTA RICA

by Dr R H SAUNDRY

(A) General considerations in forming a specialised collection of registered items.

The formation of a postal history collection comprising registration items for any given country has both advantages and disadvantages from the viewpoint of successfully putting together a visually appealing and meaningful collection of covers and related items.

Since registration is something additional to normal postal service it incurs a higher postal tariff and so registered items almost invariably are franked with either unusual combinations or with the higher value adhesives. For this reason alone registered items are often highly desirable, and even if one were only interested in collecting genuine examples of usage of these high values one would almost certainly have little recourse other than to collect registered items.

It was the great variety and form of registration labels and registration handstamps used by the Costa Rican postal authorities at different times that induced me to form a collection of Costa Rican registered items.

If for no other reason, a justification for acquiring and studying registered items is the fact that often only through studying registered items can postal rates be confirmed. It used to be common practice for most postal administrations to date stamp letters clearly not only when admitting them into the posts when the adhesives where obliterated, but also to use a dated backstamp at the office from which the letter was delivered to the addressee. From about the 1930's, largely due to the general use of machine handling of the mails, and a general reliability through improved transport systems, transit and delivery office postmarks began to disappear. Registered items however still had to be handled, logged and inspected at each stage on their journey with the result that transit and delivery office datestamps survived on this class of mail long after their use on non-registered mail had largely ceased. Often it is only from the evidence of registered items, and such items alone, that the use of routes can be confirmed.

Since the registration service offered was usually something additional to the normal postal service it is usually, though not invariably, the case that for any given period and for any given country that the number of items of registered mail available on the philatelic market is less than the number of items of non-registered mail. It is logical that this relative scarcity tends to create higher monetary value registered items. High value adhesives and multiples of adhesives found on such items also tends to make items of registered mail intrinsically valuable.

I doubt very much whether the average collector of modest means could seriously consider a specialised collection of registered items for the philatelically more popular countries such as some of the British Colonies where the earlier material is scarce and highly sought after. For collectors of Latin America, where fortunately for the readers of this article the whole field is probably under appreciated and has not been subject to the same degree of attention by speculators, there is still enough material to be able to form a representative collection of their chosen republics. It is still possible to cover fully the registration system from the turn of the century to the present time; before that items are scarce or almost unknown depending on the size, population and literacy of your given republic. This is certainly the case for the small republic of Costa Rica which last century had a population of the order of only tens of thousands and only a few availed themselves of the mails.

Happily for collectors of Costa Rica, the postal authorities kept and have left almost intact close accounts. Thus for the year 1861 we see that the total income from registered letters amounted to only 1 peso and 4 reales, which can be accounted for by either (1) three domestic registered letters, (2) one registered letter to an address in another republic of Central America plus one domestic letter, or (3) a single registered letter to a foreign non-Central American address.

Surviving registered letters used in Costa Rica prior to joining the U.P.U. in 1883 are practically unknown and it is extremely pleasing to find recorded in the philatelic literature one such letter used in 1864 (Mechin and Cohen, Collectors Club Philatelist, Vol XXVII (4)).

Not infrequently one is at a loss to understand why such and such a rate was apparently charged. Some Central American republics such as Nicaragua and Guatemala often included markings on the covers for the weight of the letter, and this is of great help. Costa Rica apparently has never done this with the result that sometimes one cannot distinguish between two alternative but equally plausible possibilities for a given franking; often letters were incorrectly franked and marrying up tables of known rates with the value of adhesives is sometimes doomed to failure. This is apparently more prevalent in modern times when rates of inflation are reflected in not infrequent changes in postal rates and multiple frankings of otherwise obsolete low-value adhesives. If we look at the complicated tables for rates when air services first became available it is not too surprising that errors were sometimes made. However this is all grist to the mill for the interested collector and reconciling postal rates to the evidence of registered covers can provide much pleasure and be the source of interest and satisfaction when the puzzle is solved.

Items of registered mail often have more intersting markings on both the front and the back of the covers. This is compounded for Latin America by the sensible precaution of making it more difficult to tamper with a letter by deliberately using multiples of adhesives and fixing them both on the front and the back of the same cover. How best do you display such covers? My rule is that if adhesives, seals or postal markings are not damaged or severed on opening out, that this is the way to display registered covers. Some collectors prefer to make photocopies and display alongside.

(B) What do we mean by a Registered service?

In Costa Rica, and presumably in most Latin American countries the registration is quite literally what "registration" should mean - the transit of the mail is recorded each time it is handled or exchanged during the journey. Thus registration is roughly equivalent to the British recorded letter system. In some countries there is a "two-tier" system for registration. For instance at the turn of the century Waterlow & Sons Ltd., London, produced special items of postal stationery for Chile either inscribed "Certificado" or "Registrado". Presumably "Certificado" was for internal "certified" mail roughly equivalent to the British recorded delivery service, and "registrado" was for the insured, or foreign service. Costa Rica has only had registered mail which is roughly equivalent to the British concept of recorded delivery. For fixed additional tariffs it is possible to send a letter as "registered insured".

It is interesting to find that in the 1930's Costa Rica employed two series of registration handstamps:- one series inscribed "Certificado" and the other "Recommande". Presumably these are equivalent, the latter being used for the foreign mail since the word "Recommande" is French, at that time the International language. It is abundantly clear that whereas in Britain, registered letters are somewhat the exception, in Costa Rica a fair proportion of the total mail is sent registered, and this is encouraged by a not too excessive premium over the basic letter rate. Registered insured letters are less common but not too infrequently met with.

In the example (fig 1 on the next page), an internal registered letter sent from Santa Cruz, Guanacaste to San José in February 1932, the letter bears a total franking of 60 ctmos.. The prevailing letter rate was 10 ctmos. with domestic registration of 30 ctmos. making a total of 40 ctmos., the balance being accounted for by insurance of contents valued at ¢40 at the rate of 5 ctmos. per ¢10. This unusual item of stationery provided by the Costa Rican authorities for transmission of valuables, had the flap closed with an official seal "Cierro de Certificados" affixed after the adhesives were placed in position, the whole being tied by the correct datestamps.

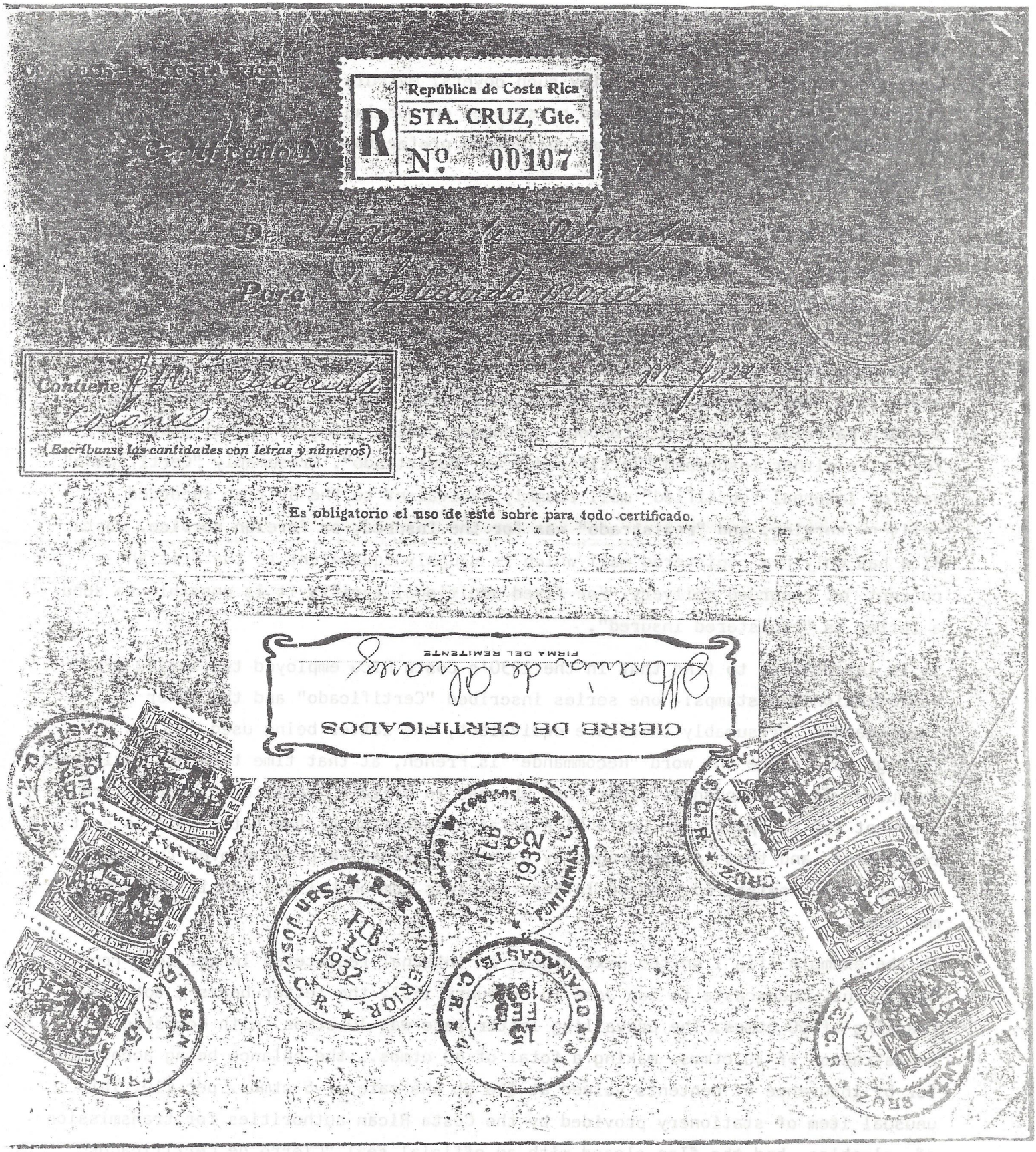
COSTA RICA
Certificado N°
República de Costa Rica
R
STA. CRUZ, Gte.
Nº 00107
Contiene
(Escríbanse las cantidades con letras y números)
Es obligatorio el uso de este sobre para todo certificado.
CIERRE DE CERTIFICADOS
FIRMA DEL REMITENTE
FEB 1932
SAN JOSE COSTA RICA
PUNTARENAS
GUANACASTE C.R.
CRUZ C.R.

Figure 1

In former times registered insured letters were probably the only available method of transmitting cash. Transmitting banknotes out of the country is registered letters is forbidden and in the 1930-40 period foreign registered letters often bore a handstamp to be signed by the sender in the presence of the postal employee who witnessed closing the envelope, declaring that the letter contained neither banknotes nor portable valuables (fig 2).

Figure 2 (back of cover)

A further intersting development of the basic registration is the "A.R" system. "A.R" ("Aviso de Recepcion", or "Acknowledgement of Receipt") service can be offered in addition to registration so that for a small additional payment word comes back to the sender that the registered letter has been safely delivered to the addressee. In earlier times the method for implementing this service in Costa Rica was for the addressee to open the letter in the presence of the delivery postal official, remove the contents, sign the back of the cover and the whole cover returned to the sender, who was then satisfied that it had been safely delivered.

It is not surprising that since such registered letters had to travel in both directions that their chance or survival and availablity for modern collectors was extremely problematical and the few such items that do exist are among the rarest of all Costa Rican postal history items. It is a matter of conjecture whether or not the registered letter (fig 3) sent from Limon to Jamaica in 1902 with the large letter "R" and wording in the handstamp exhorting the addressee to return the letter to the signed individual(s) in Limon, shows a use of a handstamp which by then was an obsolete system.

Figure 3

By the time that Costa Rica joined the U.P.U. in 1883 sending back whole covers had largely been superseded by a system whereby the addressee on receipt of an "A.R" letter had to sign a small form, which was then returned to the sender. The "A.R" system works internationally. An unusual item of "official Costa Rican postal stationery" (fig 4) was used by the postal authorities to return "A.R" receipts for letters from abroad, to the respective foreign postal authorities, in this instance returning advices to Belgium in 1891. These advice slips were themselves considered as items of value and it was necessary to send the missive registered. The wording is in French, the accepted U.P.U. International language.

Figure 4

PRESIDENTIAL AND POLITICAL CACHETS AND SEALS IN PASTORAL NICARAGUA

by LEO J HARRIS

Given the unhappy political climate currently embroiling the citizens of Nicaragua, it is refreshing to look back nearly forty years to a more tranquil time. Then, political campaigning utilised the philatelic realm. While we are familiar with cachets, cinderella seals and stamps to commemorate special events or flights, first days of issue, campaigns against disease, Christmas and Easter seals, and so on, how many of us were aware that these devices once played a part in several Nicaraguan political campaigns?

Benjamin Lacayo Sacasa became the Provisional President of Nicaragua on May 25, 1947. He or his private secretary affixed various seals on the back of official envelopes. See figures 1 and 2. The text of the two seals uses the words "work", "integrity", "order", "peace" and "liberty". These were printed in red and red-orange respectively.

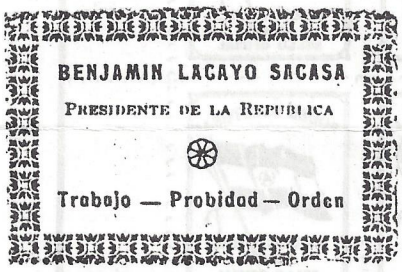

Figure 1

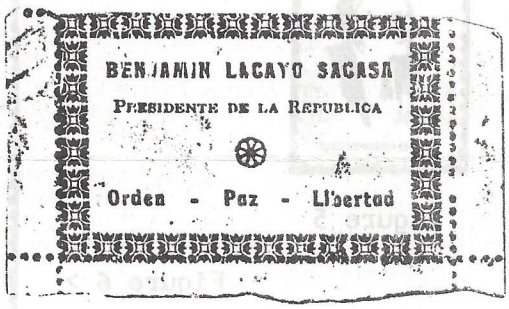

Figure 2

The third device used by this President was a violet cachet (Figure 3). The inscription reads "unity", "peace" and "progress". The cachet is struck in violet.

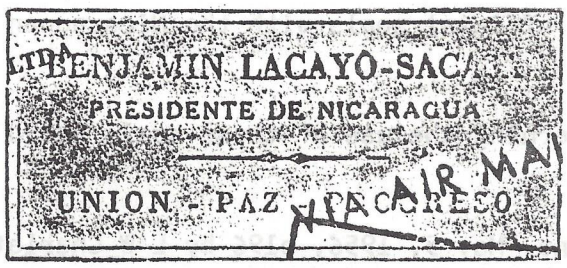

Figure 3.

Victor M Roman y Reyes was appointed President of Nicaragua on August 27, 1947. He or his private secretary utilized a single cachet, in blue or violet, over a many month period, on official correspondence (fig 4). Covers are known with this cachet for the period October 21, 1947 to June 6, 1948. President Roman y Reyes died on May 7, 1949. The cachet is inscribed "integrity", "union", "peace" and "country".